

NEWS IN brief

India takes over UNSC presidency for August

India yesterday assumed the rotating Presidency of the United Nations Security Council for the month of August. It has several important items on its agenda for the world body's functioning under this period, especially those focusing on areas of its core interests. This is India's tenth tenure. "During our Presidency in August, India is organising three high-level signature meetings, focusing on our priority areas: maritime security, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism," India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador TS Tirumurti, said in a video message straight from the Security Council.

Nazi guard, 100, to go on trial in Germany

A 100-year-old former guard at the Sachsenhausen Nazi concentration camp near Berlin will face trial in the autumn, 76 years after the end of the Second World War, German weekly Welt am Sonntag reported. The district court of Neuruppin admitted the charges of accessory to murder in 3,500 cases, and the trial is slated to start in October. The defendant should be able to stand trial for 2 to 2-1/2 hours a day, a court spokesman told the paper. The accused, who was not named in accordance with German media laws concerning suspects, was said to have worked as a camp guard from 1942 to 1945 in Sachsenhausen, where around 200,000 people were imprisoned and 20,000 murdered.

More evacuations as some wildfires rage on in Turkey

Firefighters in Turkey battled yesterday to control wildfires still raging in the resort towns of Manavgat and Marmaris, and some tourists were evacuated from Bodrum on the Aegean coast. Some 107 of the 112 fires that broke out in the past five days in Turkey had been contained as of yesterday morning, according to Forestry Ministry data. However, fires were still blazing in Manavgat in the south and Marmaris in the west, fanned by sweltering heat and winds, Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli said. Since Wednesday six people have died.

US urges Tunisia to return to 'democratic path'

Tunisia should swiftly return to its "democratic path", a top White House official on Saturday told President Kais Saied, days after his shock power grab that included suspending parliament. In an hour-long call with Saied, President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan noted support for "Tunisian democracy based on fundamental rights, strong institutions and a commitment to the rule of law", according to a White House statement. Saied on July 25 sacked premier Hichem Mechichi and suspended parliament for 30 days. He ordered a graft crackdown targeting 460 businessmen and an investigation into alleged illegal funding of political parties.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS, NDTV



A crew member from the German NGO migrant rescue ship Sea-Watch 3 distributes life jackets to migrants on an overcrowded wooden boat during a rescue operation in international waters off the coast of Tunisia, in the western Mediterranean Sea, early yesterday. *Inset*, A migrant who jumped off the boat cries for help. Two humanitarian rescue ships yesterday rescued 394 migrants, mostly from Morocco, Bangladesh, Egypt and Syria, from the Mediterranean. It was not clear if there were any deaths or injuries among the migrants.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Clashes rage in Afghanistan

Taliban rockets hit Kandahar airport; govt forces battle to thwart insurgents' assaults on key cities

AFP, Kandahar

Afghan government forces struggled against Taliban assaults on several major cities yesterday as the insurgents stepped up a nationwide offensive that saw a key airport in the south come under rocket fire overnight.

Hundreds of commandos were deployed to the western city of Herat while authorities in the southern city of Lashkar Gah called for more troops to rein in the assaults.

Fighting has surged across the country since early May when US-led foreign forces began a final withdrawal from Afghanistan that is now almost complete.

After seizing large tracts of rural territory and capturing key border crossings, the Taliban have started assaulting provincial capitals with gruelling onslaughts.

Flights out of Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city

and the former stronghold for the insurgents, were halted after rockets struck the airport before dawn.



Airport chief Massoud Pashtun said two rockets had hit the runway and repairs were underway with planes likely to resume service later yesterday.

The facility is vital to maintaining the logistics and air support needed to keep the Taliban from overrunning the city, while also providing aerial cover for large tracts of southern Afghanistan.

The attack came as the Taliban inched closer to overwhelming at

least two other provincial capitals, including nearby Lashkar Gah in Helmand province.

Afghan security forces have increasingly relied on air strikes to push the militants back from cities even as they run the risk of hitting civilians in heavily populated areas.

Further west in Herat, fighting continued on the city's outskirts overnight with air strikes targeting Taliban positions, following another day of dramatic clashes between the insurgents and Afghan security forces bolstered by local militia fighters.

Herat provincial governor's spokesman Jailani Farhad said around 100 militant fighters had been killed in the attacks.

The government has repeatedly dismissed the militants' steady gains over the summer as lacking strategic value but has largely failed to reverse their momentum on the battlefield.

Greenland experienced 'massive' ice melt this week

REUTERS, Brussels

With climate change fueling high temperatures across the Arctic, Greenland lost a massive amount of ice on Wednesday with enough melting to cover the US state of Florida in 2 inches (5.1 cm) of water, scientists said.

It was the third-biggest ice loss for Greenland in a single day since 1950. The other two records, also within the last decade, happened in 2012 and 2019. The rapid melt followed warm air being trapped over the Arctic island by a change in atmospheric circulation patterns, scientists said, noting that there could be more ice lost.

On Wednesday alone, some 22 gigatonnes of ice melted - with 12 gigatonnes flowing to the ocean and 10 gigatonnes absorbed by the snowpack where it can refreeze, said Xavier Fettweis, a climate scientist at the University of Liege in Belgium.

Polar Portal, a group of Danish Arctic research institutions, described it in a tweet as a "massive melting event." While that volume was less than the record single-day ice melt in 2019, this week's event covered a larger area, the group said.

Such events can create feedback loops that drive further warming and melting in Greenland, said Marco Tedesco, a climate scientist at Columbia University. As snow melts, it exposes darker ice or ground beneath, which absorbs more sunlight rather than reflecting it back out of the atmosphere.

"It really positions Greenland to be more vulnerable to the rest of the melting season," said Tedesco, research professor at Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

Scientists have estimated that melting from Greenland's ice sheet - the second-biggest on Earth after Antarctica's - has caused around 25% of global sea level rise seen over the last few decades.



A firefighter extinguishes a burning tree trunk as a wildfire continues near the village of Labiri, near Patras, Greece, yesterday. Around a dozen homes were destroyed and five people were hospitalised with breathing problems as authorities evacuate people from five villages in the region.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Baseless accusations'

Iran denies involvement in attack on Israeli-managed tanker; Israeli PM says he has evidence

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday rejected Israel's "baseless accusations" of being behind a deadly tanker attack off Oman, vowing to defend its interests after its arch-foe pushed for UN action against Tehran.

The MT Mercer Street, managed by prominent Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer, was struck Thursday off the coast of Oman, in an incident Israel has blamed on Iran.

Two crew members were killed, a British security guard and a Romanian crew member, in what the US military and the vessel's operator Zodiac Maritime said appeared to be a drone strike.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett yesterday said Israel was privy to "evidence" proving Iran was behind the deadly tanker attack off Oman.

"The intelligence evidence for this exists and we expect the international community will make it clear to the Iranian regime that they have made a serious mistake," the Israeli premier said at the weekly cabinet meeting in remarks conveyed by his office.

"In any case, we know how to send a

message to Iran in our own way."

On Friday, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said he had ordered the nation's diplomats to push for UN action against "Iranian terrorism".

But Iran dismissed the claims. "The Zionist regime ... must stop such baseless accusations -- and it is not their first time to direct such accusations at Iran," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters in a televised press conference.

On Saturday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke to Lapid and agreed to work with other allies "to investigate the facts, provide support, and consider the appropriate next steps," according to a State Department statement.

Maritime industry analysts Dryad Global said the attack was the fifth against a ship connected to Israel since February.

In recent months, there have been several reported attacks on Iran's shipping fleet that Tehran has linked to Israel. Iran has also accused Israel of being behind sabotage attacks against its nuclear sites, and assassinating a number of its scientists.

Quotes of the day



"The intelligence evidence for this (Iranian involvement in attack on Israeli tanker) exists and ... they have made a serious mistake."

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER
NAFTALI BENNETT



"We will accomplish the provisions of the state of emergency by August 2023. I guarantee the establishment of a union based on democracy and federalism."

MYANMAR'S MILITARY RULER
MIN AUNG HLAING VOWS
POLLS IN TWO YEARS

1970S IMMIGRATION RAIDS ON PACIFIC COMMUNITY New Zealand PM apologises

REUTERS, Melbourne

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern issued a sombre state apology yesterday to the Pacific community for racially targeted immigration raids in the 1970s that resulted in deportations and prosecutions.

The "Dawn Raids", which often occurred early in the morning, took place from 1974 to 1976 when New Zealand's economy was in a downturn and the government clamped down on immigrant workers from the Pacific who overstayed their work visas.

Addressing hundreds of people in attendance for the formal apology, Ardern said members of the Pacific communities continue to "suffer and carry the scars" of the raids in which they were specifically targeted and racially profiled.

"Today, I stand on behalf of the New Zealand government to offer a formal and unreserved apology to Pacific communities for the discriminatory implementation of the immigration laws of the 1970s that led to the

events of the Dawn Raids," Ardern said.

"The government expresses its sorrow, remorse, and regret that the Dawn Raids and random police checks occurred and that these actions were ever considered appropriate."

As part of its formal apology, Ardern said her government will provide NZ\$2.1 million (\$1.5 million) in academic and vocational scholarships for Pacific communities and \$1 million in leadership scholarships for young people from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Tuvalu, among others.

Sunday's event included an ifoga, a traditional Samoan ceremony in which people ask for forgiveness or receive forgiveness, where some ministers and members of parliament draped a mat over Ardern, which was then removed by members of the Pacific community.

"There were no reported raids on any homes of people who were not Pacific; no raids or random stops were exacted towards European people," Ardern said during her apology.

New curbs imposed across Asia

AGENCIES

China and a number of Asian countries ramped up Covid-19 curbs yesterday as Delta variant cases surged and tens of thousands rallied in France against restrictions designed to stop the pandemic.

Chinese cities rolled out mass testing of millions of people and imposed fresh travel restrictions as health authorities battled to contain the country's most widespread coronavirus outbreak in months.

China yesterday reported 75 new coronavirus cases with 53 local transmissions, with a cluster linked to an eastern airport now reported to have spread to over 20 cities and more than a dozen provinces.

The outbreak is geographically the largest to hit China in several months after the country's successes in largely snuffing out the pandemic within its borders last year.

Authorities have now conducted three rounds of testing on the city's 9.2 million residents and placed hundreds of thousands under lockdown, in an effort to curb an outbreak Beijing has blamed on the highly contagious Delta variant and the peak tourist season.

They are also scrambling to track more than 5,000 people nationwide who attended a theatre



SURGE OF COVID DELTA VARIANT

Chinese cities test millions as virus cases surge

Thailand extends pandemic measures, expands lockdown areas

Australia's east coast battles rising cases

festival in Zhangjiajie, a tourist city in Hunan province which has locked down all 1.5 million residents and shut all tourist attractions after four visitors tested positive.

The novel coronavirus has killed at least 4.22 million people since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP. The United States is the worst-affected country with 613,157 deaths,

followed by Brazil with 556,370 deaths and India with 424,351.

Meanwhile, many Asian countries and cities yesterday extended or imposed new curbs facing surging cases mostly driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant of the disease.

Thailand yesterday extended tighter containment measures in the capital and 16 more high-risk provinces probably until the end of August in a bid to slow the spread of Covid-19 as the country deals with its biggest outbreak to date. Thailand reported 18,027 infections and 133 deaths yesterday.

Meanwhile, Vietnam will from Monday extend strict curbs on movement in its business hub Ho Chi Minh City and another 18 cities and provinces throughout its south for another two weeks to help combat its worst Covid-19 outbreak, the government said.

In Australia's east coast, New South Wales and Queensland faced an escalating battle against the Delta variant yesterday, with millions under strict lockdown and authorities urging more testing and vaccinations to rein in the outbreaks.

Sydney and its surroundings reported 239 new locally acquired cases of the highly infectious Delta strain.



AUGUST 2

1858 - Government of India transferred from East India Company to the British Crown.

1939 - Albert Einstein, concerned that German scientists were working on powerful bombs using uranium, wrote to US President Franklin D Roosevelt urging him to start an atomic project.

1990 - Iraq invades, occupies Kuwait, Emir flees to Saudi Arabia.

1999 - The Awadh-Assam Express train collided head-on with the Brahmaputra Mail in eastern India, killing 285 people and injuring nearly 300.

SOURCE: REUTERS